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MEETING FARM LABOR NEEDS

A community challenge

Plans for 1943

A guide for township chairmen and school-district leaders in directing community discussion

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
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Circular 542

University of Illinois · College of Agriculture
Extension Service in Agriculture and
Home Economics

FARM LABOR SITUATION

Shortage of skilled farm labor in 1943 will undoubtedly be more acute than in 1942. More men are being taken into the rapidly expanding armed forces, and high industrial wages will continue to attract farm workers to city jobs unless national legislation prevents it.

This means that in 1943 better planning and more energetic action will be needed to find enough farm labor to meet production goals, and a great deal of this planning and action must take place in local communities. Legislation alone, altho it will help, cannot solve the problem, nor can a public program succeed unless farmers participate in it and support it, individually and in groups.

Of greatest importance are the methods that farmers themselves can work out. In each community it will be necessary for farmers first to make the best possible use of the labor they have, then to meet additional needs by supporting and taking part in such programs for labor placement as the county farm-labor committee may develop.

LOCAL LEADER'S JOB

The State Farm Labor Subcommittee,[1] in attempting to coordinate the activities of all state-wide agencies working on the farm-labor problem, urges that a farm-labor committee be formed in each county. In many counties these county committees will, in turn, ask that labor subcommittees be set up in each trade center.

At local neighborhood meetings, township chairmen and school-district leaders will be expected to do the following:

1. Explain the plans developed by the county farm-labor committee.
2. Urge that requests for farm hands be filed with the local labor subcommittee.
3. Assist farmers in filling out the labor-survey cards furnished by the Farm Adviser.
4. Urge that pools be organized for the use of labor and machines.
5. Where there is a demand for it, arrange with the Farm Adviser for a special meeting to discuss labor-saving practices.
6. Lead a discussion based on the questions given on the following pages.

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[1]At the request of the Secretary of Agriculture, this subcommittee was appointed by the Director of the Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Illinois, and designated to study farm labor problems for the State Council of Defense.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR

1. ***Will there be enough labor in this school district in 1943 to enable farmers to maintain or exceed their 1942 production? On which farms is it likely that production will be reduced by a shortage of labor?***

The labor shortage in 1943 will vary widely in different areas and on different farms. On some farms there will be enough labor, while neighboring farms may lose a third, a half, or even all their workers. This means that vigorous recruitment in nearby villages and cities will be necessary. Every physically fit worker must be considered. All unemployed or underemployed people—older persons, retired persons, business and professional men, and boys and girls—who can contribute in even a small way must be recognized as potential farm workers.

2. ***Which farms in the district will hire (a) no labor in 1943; (b) full-time married men; (c) full-time single men; (d) part-time men by the month; or (e) seasonal men by day or on a piece-work basis?***

Single men available for farm work will be scarce. More married men will be available than single men, but there is a serious shortage of housing facilities for them, and materials for new buildings and repairs are limited. For many farmers in critical areas who have housing facilities and are willing to advance the cost of transporting workers from areas of surplus labor, the U. S. Employment Service can recruit satisfactory farm workers.

The demand for seasonal labor to harvest fruits, vegetables, and canning crops and for seed-corn production can probably be filled by the U. S. Employment Service if requests are turned in well before the labor is needed.

3. ***How many farmers in the district will use city boys or girls?***

High-school boys and girls were used to good advantage in some areas in 1942 for hand work such as fruit and vegetable harvesting, work in canning factories, and detasseling corn. Many should be used for general farm work in 1943. Most high schools have plans for releasing pupils for farm work.

A series of 10 lessons is being prepared by the College of Agriculture, University of Illinois, for city boys and girls who wish to work on farms in 1943.

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Altho these lessons cannot make their readers into trained farm hands, they will acquaint the boys and girls with some of the problems connected with farm work. A placement program along with these lessons will prevent some who are physically or temperamentally unfit from being sent out to farms.

Much of the success of this plan will depend on the attitude of farm families toward these boys and girls, who will be living in a new environment and working with strange tools and materials. They need a chance to get accustomed to the work and should not be expected to start right off with a full schedule. Farm people will get the best help from these young people if they follow these rules:

Like them — everyone learns better when he knows he is liked.

Respect them — remember that most of these young people will do good work if given a chance to learn.

Help them — try to understand their difficulties and let them know they can count on you for help when they need it.

Encourage them — if their honest efforts are approved, they will do even better next time.

4. ***How can several farmers who want part-time married help arrange for it?***

Sometimes a small group of farmers can join in hiring a married man who will divide his time between the farms and thus be assured of full-time employment. Such an arrangement will work well where a house can be provided. Sometimes a house can be rented in a nearby village or on a nearby farm, sometimes a trailer can be rented or purchased, or a house not now fit for use can be repaired, or an apartment can be partitioned off in a large farm house.

5. ***How can farmers cooperate to use their labor and machines to better advantage?***

Farmers are used to exchanging work on some jobs, but in 1943 it will be necessary to do even more of this. Those farms that effectively pooled their labor and machines in 1942 were for the most part not troubled by the labor shortage. There are five possibilities for pooling:

Exchange labor. A group of farmers may make up a harvesting crew, or farmers may exchange work on a day basis.

Use machines for custom work. More custom work can be done with such labor-saving machines as combines, corn pickers, balers, and tractors.

Exchange use of one machine for use of another. A corn picker, for example, may be exchanged with a neighbor for the use of his combine. There are times when this arrangement will have a distinct advantage over operating on a custom basis.

Exchange labor for machinery. Many farmers used to doing custom work could not readily leave their farms to do this work in 1942 because they were short of labor on their own farms. In 1943 it may be necessary for the neighbors to furnish labor in exchange for use of these machines.

Own machines jointly. It may be practical for a group of farmers on small farms to own combines, corn pickers, hay tools, and other heavy machines jointly.

6. *What additional labor-saving practices can be adopted in 1943?*

By working out various labor-saving methods, many Illinois farmers could maintain or even increase their production in 1943 with the amount of labor they will have. Special discussion of this subject would be well worth while. The Farm Adviser of every county has information that will be helpful in directing such discussion. Ask him for it.

Farmers can relieve the peak load of work next spring by disposing of all possible jobs now, during the winter.

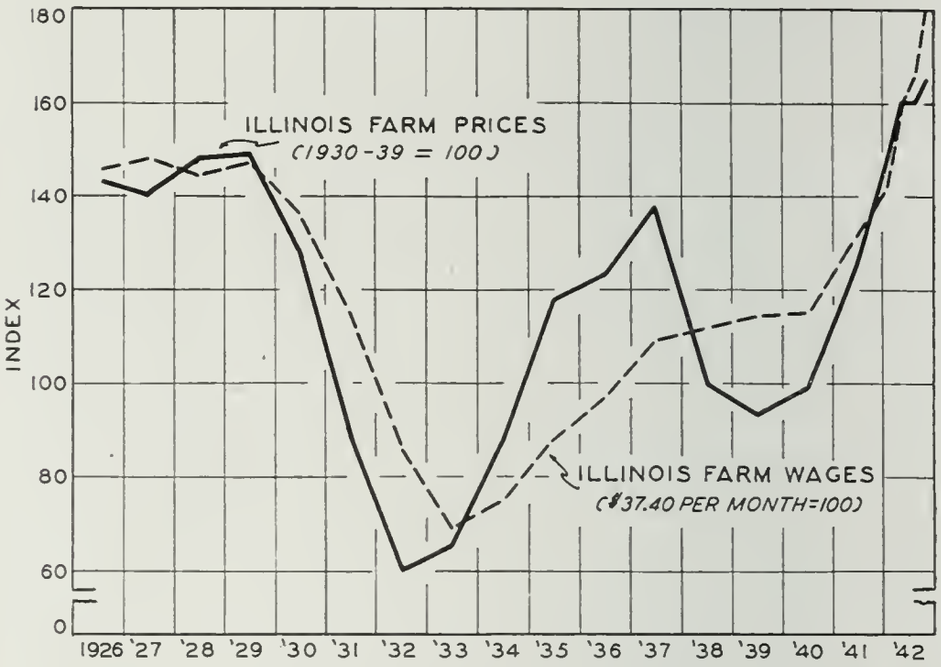
7. *What wages can farmers afford to pay in 1943?*

Farm prices and farm wages have moved together fairly well in the past 15 years (see first chart). During the past year, however, wages have risen more than prices, causing farmers to be concerned over probable wage rates in 1943.

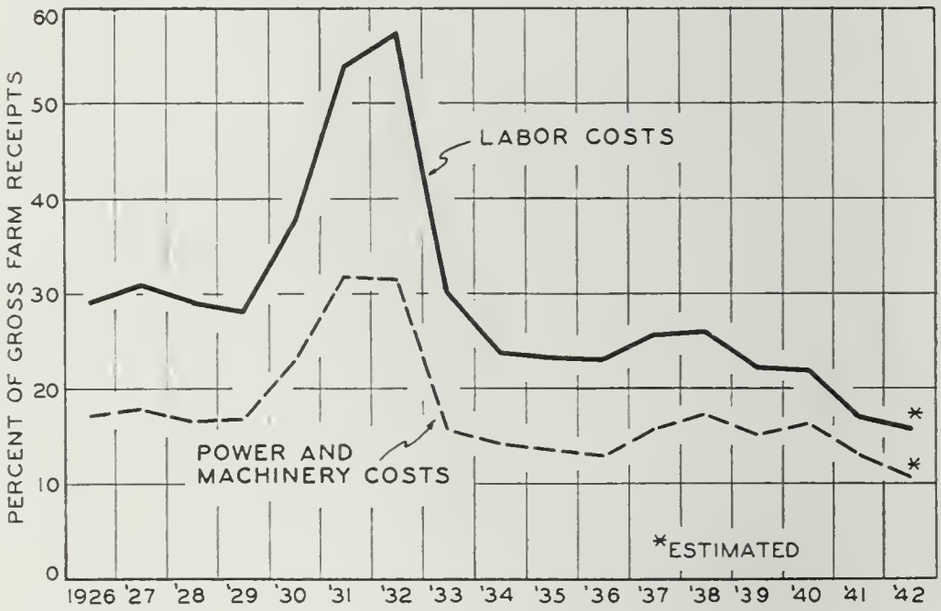
Notwithstanding these wage increases, it is nevertheless a fact that owing to increasing farm incomes and the adoption of labor-saving methods in recent years, labor costs have taken a steadily decreasing proportion of the total farm income (see second chart). Many farmers do not realize this fact. In 1941 and 1942 labor costs were less in proportion to income than at any time since 1920. Power and machinery expenses, on this basis, were also low.

Many competent hired men are staying by farm work despite the high wages offered in many industries. The housing and food provided for hired help on many farms, plus some advance in wages, is prov-

ing attractive. The payment of a cash bonus to a hired man who stays thru the year is another effective way to keep good help, according to the experience of a number of farmers.



Farm wages and farm prices in Illinois had about the same average relationship in 1942 as for the 10 years 1930-1939, when wages averaged $37.40 a month.



On Illinois accounting farms, labor costs and power and machinery costs in 1942 took a smaller part of the gross farm receipts than in any year since 1926. (Labor costs include cash labor costs plus value of unpaid labor at hired-man's wages.)

It seems clear that farmers can afford to make use of less experienced and less capable labor in 1943 and pay the wages necessary to maintain production.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics: University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. H. P. Rusk, *Director*. Acts approved by Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914. (37M—25180-S)

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